

ROBERT WALKER OF THE HIGH CHURCH (HUGH BLAIR'S COLLEAGUE)

BY THE VERY REV. HUGH WATT, D.D., D.LITT.

IT was no intention of mine to write a kind of footnote to an earlier paper to this Society, "The Influence of Martin Luther on Eighteenth Century Scotland." This may be regarded as such, but I was led to the subject in a quite independent, and apparently fortuitous way. It arose from the casual call of a Post-Graduate student, who was engaged on a thesis on Andrew Thomson. He produced his formidable list of sources, and I was in process of suggesting additions to it, when it occurred to me that there might be something on Andrew Thomson in Hauck's voluminous Encyclopaedia. The Index showed that there was. Turning to the volume indicated, we found that it was in Schian's monumental article on the history of Christian preaching. Three lines were all that were devoted to him, but not even the greatest Scottish admirer of Andrew Thomson would have been dissatisfied with the German verdict—*Ein Mann von immensem Verstand und von unwiderstehlichen Logik*. Just above, there were three lines about Hugh Blair, and a cross-reference to a special article on him. *But*, immediately following Blair, there came this—"Scarcely behind Blair's in artistic form, but surpassing them in the richness of biblical content and in sheer earnestness, are the less generally known sermons of Robert Walker, his colleague in a church in Edinburgh (died 1783. Specimens in Fish's *Masterpieces of Pulpit Eloquence*, Vol. 2)."

Here was a name I could not recall ever having met before! Who was this significant Scottish preacher that a German scholar put above men like John Willison of Dundee and John Erskine of Greyfriars, who do not even attain a mention?

I began a desultory search in my own library and it was a great relief to discover that that my ignorance was not unshared. None of the historians dealing with the Church of Scotland in the 18th century recorded his name. It was my copy of the New College Library Catalogue which first gave me the assurance that I was not pursuing a will o' the wisp or the phantom of a German brain. From it, it was evident that he had published sermons, that the sermons had passed through several editions, and that they were being reprinted a generation after his death. Surely, I thought, something must be said about him by the many diarists and

biographers. I, thereupon, turned to them. The biographies yielded nothing. Not even in Moncrieff's life of John Erskine could I find a mention.

A prolonged search of the diarists yielded four possible references. The first, a doubtful one, since the first name is not given, was in "Jupiter" Carlyle. "Walker was a rank enthusiast, with nothing but heat without light."

Consultation of the *Anecdotes and Egotisms* of Henry MacKenzie was more fruitful. On his very first page there was this reminiscence : "Lord Glenorchy, who was rather fond of his bottle, gave a very sensible direction to his servant if he had dined out of a Sunday, and had exceeded a little in drinking with the company. Lady Glenorchy, who was a very pious woman, went generally on Sunday evenings to a religious meeting in the house of Dr. Walker, minister of the High Church, and Lord Glenorchy used to attend. But if he was to dine in company beforehand, he told his servant, when he came to attend him to his carriage, to offer him the wrong side of his surtout, and, if he objected, to carry him to the meeting ; but if he tried to put it on as it was, to carry him home."

Somerville of Jedburgh, in his neglected, but racy, account of his own life and times, has a comparative study of the preachers of Edinburgh in his student days. He seems to have been an attentive and appreciative hearer, but a discriminating one. Not one of the mighty men of his youth escapes unscathed. His most favourable appraisals have always a sting in their tails, e.g., of one man, who, he says, "possessed every attribute of a good preacher," and who so delivered his sermons "as at once to instruct and delight his hearers," he thus concludes his account, "his stock of discourses was scanty." Here is his verdict on Hugh Blair's colleague. "Mr. Walker, of the High Church, compressed and softened the Calvinistical doctrines, in simple Addisonian language, pronounced with a vivacity, harmony and sweetness of tone, that charmed every ear ; his sermons being chiefly liable to censure on account of a sameness of thought ! "

The fourth reference was in Henry Grey Graham's *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century* which, in part, is the *omnium gatherum* of many diaries and periodicals. He says that the fashionable world of Edinburgh flocked to the High Church when Hugh Blair was preaching. "They took care not to go to the 'diet' when his colleague, Mr. Robert Walker, did duty ; for that estimable man was as evangelical as his partner was moderate, one who preached Calvinism and denounced worldly dissipation, and indeed had boldly preached powerful discourses before the Magistrates and the Lords of Session on the iniquity of patronising

the stage, to which Mr. Blair was addicted. To his ministrations the poorer classes came, and the church plate was then conspicuous for the number of halfpence, an observant elder remarking that it took twenty-four of Mr. Walker's hearers to equal in contribution one of Mr. Blair's."

These four references were all that my library yielded at the time. But a ministerial colleague of Hugh Blair's who could fill St. Giles with half-penny hearers and, at the same time, could keep Lord Glenorchy sober—or at least make him ashamed of being drunk—which not even his pious wife could do till near the end, aroused a considerable degree of curiosity in my mind. That curiosity sent me to the shelves in New College Library where three or four editions of his sermons rested in undisturbed repose. Selecting the handiest and least dusty of them, I took the two volumes home and began to read. I had not read far, till I began to feel that here was a neglected source of enlightenment for the development of the thought of the Church of Scotland and that they deserved to be rescued from oblivion. And having read and re-read the 962 pages of this edition (74 sermons in all) I am still of the same opinion. I am not going to inflict on you an account of delvings into his biography. My concern is with the sermons. But a very brief sketch of his life should be given at this point.

He was born in the Canongate Manse in 1716. His father seems to have been a faithful minister, immersed in his Parish, except for occasional journeys in support of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Edinburgh was naturally his University, and he finished his course in Arts and Divinity in 1736, at the age of 20—too young to be licensed at its close. He was in Galloway when his 21st birthday arrived, so he was licensed by the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright. His first charge was at Straiton in South Ayrshire, where he spent 8 happy years (1738-46). He left it to return to the Edinburgh area, being inducted to the Second Charge of South Leith in 1746. Eight years later, there were at the same time, three vacancies in Edinburgh in the patronage of the Town Council. He was selected as one of the three to fill them, and since, with 16 years' ministry behind him, he happened to be the senior, he was appointed to what was held to be the most important charge—collegiate minister of the main part of the High Church (St. Giles). For 37 years he ministered there, with Hugh Blair as colleague for the last 25 of them.

It fell to his colleague to preach the funeral sermon. From it I extract this one paragraph. "God had blessed him with great natural abilities. . . . Seldom have any been endowed with a more just discernment of what is beautiful in composition and discourse, or with a more accurate sensibility to what is becoming in manner and behaviour. Possessing

these talents, he was at the same time modest, unassuming, unpretending. He was simple in his manner : simple in his taste of life : altogether free from ostentation or vanity. A manly firmness formed the distinguishing part of his character. As he acted uniformly upon principle, he was bold and undaunted in maintaining what he judged to be right ; but without the heat of violence or passion. . . . To the merit of others, he was ever disposed to do justice. His eye was not evil, when they prospered. He was superior to the little competitions and jealousies, which prevail in vulgar minds." It is an attractive picture—a trifle coloured, it may be, by what Hugh Blair would have desired others to think or say of himself.

There is not one word in the brief biography or in the funeral sermon of any public work. He might have done nothing outside his various parishes. It is only when we observe the occasions on which sermons were preached that we realise that he was Moderator of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale in 1761 and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1771. Diligent research in the Tolbooth records might reveal activities in Synod and General Assembly.

It is to the extant sermons that we turn. For his *Masterpieces of Pulpit Eloquence* Fish chose sermon vii on "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." But, much better, to my mind, and more characteristic is Sermon xi on "He that spared not His own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things ?" My judgment is confirmed by the James Gillan who bought one of the copies now in New College Library in 1822, and has marked this sermon with a double asterisk, but I propose to deal discursively, but faithfully, with my own reactions to the sermons as a whole.

And first, a word as to the language. "Addisonian" said Somerville. The epithet is not inept. If Addison had written sermons, this is not unlike the way he would have written them. There is little of the pulpit jargon, commonly attributed to the High-fliers. Almost the only usage which would baffle the average hearer of to-day is the obsolete use of the word 'improve.' To "improve a doctrine" meant to apply it to mind and heart and conscience. And no faithful preacher of any School in the 18th century could refrain from 'improving' his text. Possibly his colleague Hugh Blair would have said that his vocabulary, varied as it was, bore too close an affinity to that of the Authorised Version ; but that gives it at times a pith and pungency which, to our ears, is sadly wanting in Hugh Blair's rounded periods. The one habit that did jar a little was the frequent recurrence of a phrase, "in dependence upon

Divine aid." The preacher of to-day may be equally conscious of his need of it, but he does not express it quite so openly, or so often, and especially at the point it normally appears in Walker, just before the outline of the discourse that is to follow. Here is a short passage which illustrates these habits. He is preaching on Heb. 4, 16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

"In order to render this text profitable for our instruction and comfort, I propose, *in dependence upon Divine aid,*

First, to explain what is meant by *coming boldly unto the throne of grace.*

Secondly, to consider the errand upon which we are invited to come ; namely, *that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* After which, I shall, in the

Third place, illustrate the motives or grounds of encouragement suggested by the Apostle in the context ; . . .

And then direct you to the practical *improvement* of the whole."

This leads us on directly to the content of the sermons. There is one interesting feature of these sermons which ought to be mentioned. And it should come in here, though it belongs neither to language nor to theological content. It is one quite telling method of presentation, which can hardly be called a habit, though it does recur more than once. It is that of rewriting his text ironically to suit the beliefs of certain classes of men. Let me give one example. His text on this occasion is Hebrews 12, 28-29 : "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear : for our God is a consuming fire." In the course of the sermon he says : "In order to make this passage of Scripture speak the language of that scheme of religion which is too current in the world, the words of it would need to be transposed and varied in some such manner as this :

"Prompted by self-love, and the tormenting fear of future punishment, let us resolve in our minds, for we neither need nor expect supernatural grace, that henceforth we will serve God, as well as the world and the flesh will permit, that so we may escape damnation, and procure a title to, or at least the probable chance of a kingdom ; which, after all, may not only be moved, but so agitated and shaken, that without a vigorous exertion of the powers we possess, we ourselves may be tossed out, and fall into perdition."

More than any other body of sermons known to me, they are, in the strictest sense, *exegetical preaching*. We feel that an honest and resolute attempt has been made to probe the full meaning of the text in its immediate context. No side-issues, however attractive, are allowed to distract attention from the main theme. No irrelevancies are permitted. It is perhaps the hardest form of preaching ; and, certainly not the most popular. But in Mr. Walker's case, it drew the general populace of Edinburgh—and some few of the more saintly of its aristocrats.

Further, practically all his illustrations are Biblical. Occasionally, they are of the nature which a concordance might furnish. An important word may be illumined by its use in some other part of the Bible. But in most of them there is no such verbal coincidence. The religious situation disclosed by his exegesis suggests some similar situation in some other book. He seems to have known his Bible from cover to cover. And even those who prided themselves on a similar knowledge would find in most sermons, fresh light on passages that were familiar. For no superficial resemblance would have passed muster in an illustration ; there must be some fundamental similarity in the plight of saint or sinner and in God's dealings with him. His illustrations have to pass through the same exegetical mesh as the text itself. No wonder Schian spoke of their "richness of Biblical content."

But are there no other illustrations ? Well, there is an occasional one from nature—*about one in twelve sermons*—the most noteworthy being this : “ Many, like the lapwing, are continually fluttering about, and, with artful screams, lament the vices of all around them, merely to draw off their attention from their own cage of unclean birds.” There is still less direct reference to books other than the Bible. *Once* he quotes the Shorter Catechism—just a phrase—*once* he quotes Athanasius—*once* the judgment of one of the fathers presumably (from the quotation)—one of the early fathers—and *twice* he makes longer quotations from authors nearer to his own age. One is from a “ judicious and pious writer ” unnamed who—since he launches forth against Deism must have been almost a contemporary—and the other is from Judge Hales—his not quite forgotten verdict on the advantage and indeed, necessity, of the observance of the Lord's Day. And apart from references and quotations he does show his awareness of the contents of books, occasionally mentioning what ‘hostile writers’ (unnamed) have to say on certain subjects. So far as I can remember, there is not a single poetical quotation in the four volumes—not even a quatrain or a couplet from the Metrical Psalter—a fact all the more remarkable when Lady Glenorchy did not seem to consider even an ordinary letter complete without one or more.

No one could accuse him of being an 'anecdotal' preacher. Once only does he venture on an illustrative story. And he has to give his matter an unusual twist to bring it in. He has been dealing with the intercession of Christ. In all our thoughts of it, he lays down, justice has to be done to two fundamental facts : the assured love of the Father, and the constant prevailing intercession of the Son. But now, he says, let us make the supposition that the Father's love was doubtful ; let us picture God as more averse to a reconciliation than the most gloomy, self-tormenting mind can conceive. "We have a famous story recorded of two brothers at Athens which I shall briefly relate to you. One of them, for some high misdemeanour, was condemned to lose his life, and was going to be led to execution, when his brother, who had lost his hand in the defence of his country, and had been the means of gaining a victory which was of the last importance to the State, came suddenly into the court ; and, without saying a word, but barely holding up his mutilated arm, so prevailed with the judges by this remembrance of what he had formerly done, that they instantly discharged the delinquent brother, though he had forfeited his life. Thus far does the intercession of men prevail with men ; and shall not the constant presentation of the Lamb that was slain . . . shall not this be as operative and powerful with THE LOVING FATHER " ?

This is his solitary incursion into the realm of classical story. And I wonder where he found it. He may have had a most excellent library in his manse, his home 'on the Castlehill, nearly opposite the water reservoir.' He may have made considerable use of it. But he certainly does not display it in the pulpit. So far as his people could see he was *a man of one book*.

But what were the predominant features of the message he proclaimed from the one book ? Somervell says that he " compressed and softened the Calvinistical doctrine." Certainly, his whole world-view is Calvinistic and Pauline. But he does not display the predilection of his evangelical contemporaries for Pauline and Calvinistic *theology*. Few of its technical terms find a place in his pulpit vocabulary. I cannot recall meeting the terms Predestination and Reprobation in his many pages. There is no sign that he ever anxiously asked himself when writing, "Is this in complete harmony with the Westminster Confession ?" or "Will this bring upon me any of the anathemas of the Synod of Dort ?" His one concern was to expound the faith which had been revealed—not so much as a faith once delivered to the saints—as the faith which had made and upheld the saints of the New Testament—i.e., the religion behind the Pauline and Calvinist theology. May I put it thus: the Calvinism of

the late 18th century, on the lips of its exponents, had degenerated into what I can only call TRANSACTIONISM: the whole emphasis was on a SCHEME OF SALVATION: in which the sovereignty of God had been marvellously displayed, and would yet be displayed in greater glory. What mattered was not the *doer*, but *the thing done or yet to be accomplished*. Your typical Calvinist was lost in amazement before the unfolding of a majestic plan. It is this that accounts for the unprecedented popularity of a now forgotten epic, Robert Pollok's *Course of Time*, with its final paean of adoring wonder at the ineffable culmination by which the Divine Sovereignty hushes into silence all the questions of the hitherto bewildered soul.

Now, Mr. Walker shares this vision; but it is not the substance of his preaching. His emphasis may be on sovereign grace, but it is more concerned with intimate and personal relations here and now, than with an inevitable and glorious cosmic justification of the Great Governor of the Universe. May I take the liberty of quoting one somewhat lengthy passage. It is from *Sermon ix*, of which the text is: "Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

" Few animals are beset with more enemies than sheep; and perhaps none are possessed of less cunning to elude, or of less courage to resist them. Their safety depends upon the shepherd's care; for, if they wander beyond the reach of his protecting arm, they become at once, to every ravenous beast, not only a tempting, but an easy, prey. With what awful precision doth this part of the similitude exhibit to us the state of unconverted sinners! Their spiritual enemies are both numerous and mighty; the subtlety of the serpent, and the strength of the lion are but faint representations of their craft and power; yet such is the presumption of carnal men, so fatal the security of those who are far from God; that, instead of avoiding their blood-thirsty foes, they roam without fear through their most frequented haunts, and rush headlong into those snares that are laid for their destruction.

Once more, though sheep are not the only creatures that are prone to wander, yet it may justly be affirmed of them, that they, of all others, discover least sagacity in finding their way back to the place from whence they strayed: so that in them we likewise behold a proper and most descriptive emblem of man's helpless and impotent state by nature, and of his utter inability, by any efforts of his own, to regain his primeval happiness and glory. That the Apostle intended to convey this idea, is more than probable from the form of his expression in the latter part of the verse: where, speaking of the recovery of wandered sinners, he doth

not say YE HAVE RETURNED, as if by their own sagacity they had discovered their error, and then rectified it by the activity of their own natural powers ; but it deserves our notice that he puts the word into the Passive voice—YE ARE RETURNED—i.e., converted, or caused to return, as the same word is elsewhere rendered. For what our Lord said to his first disciples may be addressed to believers in every age of the Church : ‘ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.’ ‘ It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ ‘ By grace we are saved, through faith : and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.’ Nor can any words be conceived more absolute and decisive than these, which were uttered by Christ Himself : ‘ No man cometh unto Me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw Him.’ ”

May I add to this one shorter quotation. In one sermon he has occasion to define what is meant by GODLINESS : and this is the result : “ GODLINESS, in general, is the subjection or devotedness of the soul to God Himself. It is the practical acknowledgment of His unlimited sovereignty, and the unreserved dedication of the whole man to His service ; or, to speak in the emphatical language of this Apostle, it is ‘ Christ formed ’ in the heart, by the powerful energy of the Holy Spirit, in consequence whereof, the person becomes ‘ a new creature,’ both with regard to his temper and practices ; ‘ he partakes of the Divine Nature ’ and ‘ those members ’ which were formerly ‘ the servants of sin ’ are now employed as ‘ instruments of righteousness unto God.’ ”

These two quotations will, I hope, serve to show what I meant when I said that for him sovereign grace was more concerned with intimate and personal relations. They will also show that he repudiated whole-heartedly both Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism.

But there was another divergence from Calvinism as currently expounded. This was calculated to leave on the mind the picture of an inscrutable and almighty Governor of the Universe : it was apt to blur the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Walker’s favourite text seems to have been “ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” And this was interpreted, illustrated, and commended in such a way that it leaves the suspicion that there was another ancient heresy from which Mr. Walker was not immune—the Patri-passian. God to him was the seeking God, who, yearning with an infinite longing for the salvation of His wandering children, shared in all the efforts and sufferings of His Son. ‘ God was in Christ.’ He has left behind no sermon on the text. But the text itself is quoted in about 25 per cent. of his sermons *and in this sense*. ‘ In all Christ’s afflictions he was afflicted.’ No one of Mr. Walker’s hearers could ever have given utterance to the

words that Olive Schreiner puts into the mouth of a boy who had listened to a long series of high Calvinist sermons from Dutch Reformed preachers, 'I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God.' I remember an aged uncle who said to me, when Olive Schreiner's book came out, 'That was precisely my reaction to the preaching I heard in my youth.' In Mr. Walker, the features of the Disposer of all Events are adequately filled in. Looking up to Him, we see Jesus.

In these two respects, therefore, there is a different emphasis from that of the current Calvinism. What is the source of this? I have no doubt that Mr. Walker, if he was aware of it at all, would have attributed it to the testimony of Scripture. Lady Glenorchy, who was no theologian, seems to have found in him something reminiscent of John Wesley. But Mr. Walker is clear enough in his own mind that he had taken nothing from that quarter. To me it seems that the main source is the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Since the controversy that agitated Scotland on the republication of that book was over its supposed Antinomianism, its other features have been too lightly passed over. And there are notes in the *Marrow* which are not unlike these stresses that seem distinctive of Mr. Walker. And like other stresses too, e.g., Mr. Walker certainly believed in Heaven and Hell. But the element of *reward* and *punishment* does not enter into his thought of them; well, perhaps that is too strong; but it does not bulk largely in his thought of them. Heaven, for him, is the consummation of the life that now is: Hell the natural goal of the sinner's course. And you will recall that one of the *five distinct heresies* which the General Assembly of 1720 found in the *Marrow* was 'that the fear of punishment and the hope of reward were not allowed to be motives of a believer's obedience.'

It may be said that it is very precarious to assume Mr. Walker's acquaintance with the *Marrow*. Had not the General Assembly condemned it in his youth? Had it not branded it as a dangerous book which was to be avoided? And was not the decision popularly interpreted as an absolute forbidding to read the *Marrow*? But there were ways of getting round the decision even when thus interpreted. I recall a story (I could not lay hands on it again, and so I cannot name the minister involved) of one prominent minister visiting another and finding on his desk a copy of the *Marrow*, evidently much used, and thus remonstrating with him. 'Do you not know that the General Assembly has condemned the book?' 'Aye,' said the other, 'but it did not condemn Thomas Boston's *Notes on the Marrow*, and it is these I have been consulting.' The casuist of this story may, for all I know, have been Mr. Walker himself. At any rate, the *Marrow* did bring a fresh note into some Scottish pulpits, and it seems to me that St. Giles was one of them.

There are two other minor points which are not without interest. One is his outlook on the Scottish past. Unlike the other evangelicals, he is not constantly harping on our Covenanting forefathers, recalling what they did and suffered, and what they said. I do not think he cites them once. When he does recall the Scottish past there are only two moments on it. ‘Our deliverance from Popery at the Reformation, and the full establishment of our civil and religious liberties at the Revolution.’ These were *par excellence* the marvellous doings of God in Scotland. The other is, his outlook on the prevailing sins of the present. Relevant sins appear in most of the sermons ; but in one he takes the trouble to catalogue them. He begins with gross crimes like theft, oppression, murder, blasphemy, and perjury. These are (as is right in the eyes of all men) punishable by the law of the land. But there are certain other prevailing sins which do not come under the purview of the civil judge, but are equally obnoxious to the Judge of all. These are profane swearing (and this recurs with an alarming frequency in other sermons), uncleanness, drunkenness, breach of the Lord’s Day, and habitual neglect of divine institutions (in which he includes the Lord’s Supper, public worship on the Lord’s Day, and family worship every day). But then (and mark you, he is not preaching on the Parable of the Talents, his eye is on certain features of his own Edinburgh), he waxes eloquent on the sin of those who do not make their contribution to the welfare of the community. ‘In vain, O misguided men ! will you plead at the great day, that you abused no talent bestowed upon you—that ye did harm to none of all God’s works. Was it for this negative purpose only, do you think that your Master gave you a place in His world ? Was for this only, that he conferred the active powers of your nature ? that he gave you reason to preside over these powers ? and His word to guide that reason ? . . . Is it nothing that your being is a CHASM IN CREATION, where Infinite Wisdom intended that nothing should be void ? ’ . . .

I have no doubt that those who attended St. Giles with a hangover expected their dissipation to be rebuked ; but some of the all-too-plentiful drones of the city must have been surprised to find their pleasant idleness branded as a COSMIC CRIME ?

Nevertheless, they ought not to have been surprised—for this outlook on life was in the Scottish standards from the beginning. It is there in the First Book of Discipline. “The rich and potent may not be permitted to spend their youth in vaine idlenesse, as heretofore they have done. But they must be exhorted—and by the censure of the Kirk compelled—to dedicate their sonnes . . . to the profite of the kirk and commonwealth.”

There is one further point that must be dealt with before we take our

leave of the sermons. I read them with the words of Henry Grey Graham in my mind. "That he had boldly preached powerful sermons before the Magistrates and the Lords of Session on the iniquity of patronising the stage, to which Mr. Blair was addicted." I felt that to call Hugh Blair an addict, on the basis of his stand for John Home's *Douglas*, was straining language, but I saw no reason in advance to question his judgment on Robert Walker. But in the 74 sermons I could only find ONE reference to the stage. The sermon in which it occurs is on the text, 'Let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1, 27). And in the *improvement* of the text he writes : "Should any indeed be so perverse as to resist the influence of the(se) doctrines of the Gospel . . . while at the same time they acknowledged the evidence of their truth, it would not at all surprise me to see them crowding, from day to day, the public theatres, that the regularity and decorum of a fictitious representation might draw their attention away from that real and ill-conducted medley in which they themselves acted their disgraceful parts." This very sound suggestion, that some use the theatre, as others use detective novels, as an escape, could hardly be basis enough for pillorying Robert Walker as a Scottish Histrio-mastix. Grey Graham must have had some other authority than the published sermons. And I found it—in James Paterson's contribution of a life of Walker to Kay's *Edinburgh Portraits*, and this, in turn, led me to a mass of pamphlet literature of which I had no knowledge. But the story there disclosed is worth re-telling.

In the last quarter of the 18th century, Samuel Foote had a high place in the English stage as author, producer, and actor. He objected to his productions being called Drolls or Interludes—they were Comedies, he claimed, in the classical tradition of Comedy. More than one aroused considerable resentment. But the most offensive of all was *Minor*, a burlesque on the activities of George Whitefield as Dr. Squintum—with an Epilogue, spoken by Foote himself, in which every effort is made to make Dr. Squintum absolutely ridiculous. Here are the last lines of Dr. Squintum's tirade :—

For foremost rows in side-boxes you shove
Think you to meet with side-boxes above
Where giggling girls and powder'd fops may sit
No! you will all be crammed into the pit
And crowd the house for Satan's benefit.
Oh what! you snivel! Well, do so no more
Drop, to atone, your money at the door
And, if I please, I'll give it to the poor.

In London the play met with a mixed reception, but the number of those who enjoyed hearing a Hot-Gospeller shown up was large enough to give it a fairly long run.

George Whitefield died in Massachusetts on September 30, 1770. The news reached this country some time in October. In November, Samuel Foote came with his company to Edinburgh. Plays were announced for most of the week—and the *Minor* was not among them. But the Saturday had been left vacant for the choice of the Lord President of the Court of Session. He, unfortunately, handed over the choice to Mr. Foote. And, when he learned that Mr. Foote was going to exhibit the *Minor*, he asked him not to exhibit the ludicrous Epilogue. But, on the Saturday night, in response to calls from some of the audience, but amid protests from others, the Epilogue was duly spoken.

Word must have come that very night to the High Church Manse. Mr. Walker was due to preach the next day, and his sermon was ready. It was on 2 Cor. 5, 14-21. But when he came to v. 17, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,' he launched forth on this interpolation. 'I cannot read this verse without expressing the just indignation I feel upon hearing that last night a profane piece of buffoonery was publicly acted, in which, unless it hath undergone very material alterations—this sacred doctrine, and some others connected with it, are introduced to the stage with no other purpose but to gratify the impiety, and to excite the laughter of thoughtless, miserable, dying sinners. . . . If men are bold enough to act impiety, surely a minister of the Church may at least be equally bold in reproving it: he hath a patent for doing so, more valid and authoritative than any theatre can possess, or any power on earth can give.'

'Manly words' a contemporary journal calls them; but, surely, only to be expected in such a situation. Evangelical Edinburgh must have felt them too tepid, for they rushed to buy copies of the sermon in which Rev. James Baine of the Relief Church flayed Samuel Foote alive for every feature of the *Minor*, and in particular, for playing that base Epilogue when George Whitefield was hardly cold in his grave. The popularity of this sermon roused Samuel Foote to reply in a pamphlet called *An Apology for the Minor*, the virulence of which is only matched by its ineptitude. I am tempted, though it is a manifest digression, to quote two samples:

Mr. Baine: Foote, in his *Minor*, has put expressions into the mouth of Mrs. Cole, a bawd, fit only to be uttered by the Devil.

Answer: Why, they, they do come from the mouth of a being very little better than the devil; but for those she or her teachers are answerable, not your humble servant; these are *her* words, not *mine*.

Then, Mr. Baine had cited the verdicts of certain of the fathers on the stage. ' You cite them,' rejoins Mr. Foote, ' without once considering where they lived, or when they wrote. Clemens wrote in 192, Chrysostom in 354, St. Augustin in 436, *all of them in Italy* ! '

But to return to Mr. Walker's sober protest. The evidence for his ' tirades on the iniquity of patronising the stage to which Mr. Blair was addicted ' boils down to nothing. I feel assured that if it had fallen to Hugh Blair to refer to this incident, his verdict would have been equally firm, and the terms of it no more restrained.

I wrote this before I had made the acquaintance of Lady Glenorchy's *Journal*, where it was fully confirmed by the entry for November 25th, 1770. ' I heard Mr. Walker this morning and Mr. Erskine (Dr. John Erskine of Greyfriars) in the afternoon bear their testimony against the horrid and blasphemous farce that was acted last night in this place.' And it may be no mere co-incidence that, six months later, his brethren, mainly Moderates, called him to be Moderator of the General Assembly.

Had I thought earlier of reading Dr. Jones' *Life of Lady Glenorchy*, the discursive notes of this paper might have been otherwise arranged. For the many admirable letters of Mr. Walker which that biography records, shed a revealing light on the activities of the writer. Lady Glenorchy was, in many respects, a most admirable woman, whose position in society created many genuine problems for a religious enthusiast. But she created even more for herself by an introversion which almost amounts to ' religious hypochondria.' She was akin to Mrs. Bowes in her constant dependence on ' mediated religious guidance.' And Robert Walker's contributions in the one case are as patient, and kindly, and penetrating as those of John Knox in the other.

Those Sunday evening religious meetings at which Lord Glenorchy would only appear sober began at his wife's request. At first, they were held in rotation, at the homes of a number of aristocratic ladies who shared some of Lady Glenorchy's enthusiasm; but after a time—from 1767 onwards—they were regularly held at the Manse, and were continued, we are told, till the very Sunday before he died, with the loyal band, mainly of devout ladies, undiminished.

There is no time to enter into the content of the letters that passed. One of them, at least, would deserve a place in any anthology of Christian

letters. But from them, it is clear that it was Mr. Walker's presentation of Calvinism that won her from her first allegiance to John Wesley's Arminianism ; that it was he who dissuaded her from her scheme of a Chapel with no ecclesiastical affiliation (but open to all preachers whom she cared to invite), and finally secured it for the Church of Scotland ; that even after she had persuaded the Presbytery of Edinburgh to induct her English discovery, Rev. T. S. Jones, to the ministry of her chapel, all major difficulties were referred to Mr. Walker.

But this correspondence does not come within the scope of this study. I have, quite deliberately, restricted its scope to his preaching. Through the printed sermons, I have spent a considerable time in Mr. Walker's world, and I feel I have been in the best of company.
